

You may feel that you need some help in teaching your child resilience. If you are feeling stuck or overwhelmed and unable to use the tips listed above, you may want to consider talking to someone who can help, such as a psychologist or other mental health professional. Turning to someone for guidance may help you help your child strengthen his or her resilience and persevere in a time of war.

Tips for Parents and Day-Care Providers of Preschool Children

RESILIENCE IN A TIME OF WAR

Information contained in this brochure should not be used as a substitute for professional health and mental health care or consultation. Individuals who believe they may need or benefit from care should consult a psychologist or other licensed health/mental health professional.

The American Psychological Association Practice Directorate gratefully acknowledges the following contributors to this publication:

Mary K. Alvord, PhD, director, Group Therapy Center at Alvord, Baker, and Associates, LLC, Silver Spring, MD

Rosalind Dorlen, PsyD, ABPP, CAPP board member, Allied Professional Staff, Overlook Hospital, Summit, NJ

Robin H. Gurwitch, PhD, associate professor, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center's Department of Pediatrics

Ronald S. Palomares, PhD, assistant executive director, Practice Directorate, American Psychological Association

The American Psychological Association (APA), located in Washington, DC, is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States. Its membership includes more than 155,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students. APA works to advance psychology as a science and profession and as a means of promoting health, education, and human welfare.

For additional copies of this brochure, call 1-800-964-2000 or go to the APA Web site, www.APAHelpCenter.org

Copyright © 2003 American Psychological Association. All rights reserved.



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

750 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4242

*A time of war
can be scary
for very young
children,
especially
because terrorism
has brought fear
so close
to home...*

...Events are uncertain for children. Their friends' parents, or perhaps their own parents, may be called away to serve in the military. Although you may think they are too young to understand what is happening, even very young children can absorb frightening events from the news or from conversations they overhear.

You teach children so much: how to walk, how to talk, how to share. You may wonder how you can possibly teach them and reassure them during a time of war. The good news is that many children have a certain amount of natural ability to bounce back from bad events; the better news is that it is possible to teach children the skills of resilience—the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress.

What are some tips that can help you teach your children resilience? As you use these tips, keep in mind that each child's journey along the road to resilience will be different and that your own knowledge of your child will guide you.

10 Tips for Parents and Teachers of Preschool Children in a Time of War

1. Talk with your children. When they have questions, answer them honestly but simply and with reassurance. Ask them what they think is happening, and listen to their answers. Be ready for questions that may be difficult to answer, such as, “Why do they hate us?” and “Will Daddy die when he's fighting over there?”

2. Use your family like a security blanket for your children: Wrap them up in family closeness. Especially during a time of war,

make sure your children have lots of family time. Spend more time with your children playing games, reading to them, or just holding them close.

3. Limit the amount of news your children watch during a time of war. Turn off the TV or radio when war coverage is on. You don't need to hide what's happening in the world from your children, but neither do you have to expose them to constant stories about war. Put away newspapers and magazines that have extensive photo coverage of war or frightening covers.

4. During a time of war, map out a routine and stick to it. Young children like routines and rituals. If bedtime is the time you read stories to your children, make sure you keep that time for stories. Your child may be less able to handle change at home when the world situation is unstable.

5. Make sure you take care of yourself. Your children read your face for clues as to how to feel. If they fall down and see concern on your face, they will be much more likely to decide that the fall hurt. Similarly, if your face reflects the stress and fear you may feel in a time of war, they will pick up on that. Many people find that turning to a higher power, whether through organized religion or privately, can help. Take care of yourself so that you can take care of your children.

6. Use play to help your children express their fears about what is happening. Encourage them to use art or pretend games to express what they may not be able to put into words.

7. Tell your children that they will be all right. Reassure them that they will be protected. Have an emergency plan for the family and share whatever parts of it you think your children can understand. You might tell

them, for example, that home is “base” if something happens, but that Aunt Carol's house is another safe place you can visit.

8. Watch your children for signs of fear and anxiety they may not be able to put into words. Have your children become extra clingy, needing more hugs and kisses than usual? Have your children started wetting the bed or sucking their thumb after you thought they had outgrown that behavior? They may be feeling the pressure of what is going on in the world around them.

9. Enlist your children's help. Just because your children are very young does not mean they can't do age-appropriate chores, even if it's just putting placemats on the table. If your children know that they have a role to play and that they can help, they will feel more in control and more confident.

10. Put things into a positive perspective for your children. Your children have not been around long enough to know that things can change and that wars end. But, they may have experienced something bad or scary that they overcame, and you can point out a time when they had courage before. When you talk about bad times, make sure you talk about the good times in the future as well.

You can teach your children resilience. But just because your children learn resilience doesn't mean they won't have bad times. Bad times hurt, and your children will have times when they aren't happy. Resilience is a journey, and each child will take his or her own time along the way, just as each child walked or talked in his or her own time. Your child may benefit from some of these resilience strategies, while other children may benefit from other strategies. The skills of resilience you teach your child in a time of war will be useful to him or her even after war, and they are good skills to have in daily life.